What are some reasons for initiating an evaluation?

* If an evaluation is requested/required, the evaluator should know what the reasoning was behind the request
* The evaluator needs to ask questions and listen closely (to client and stakeholders) to determine the rationale behind the request
* Throughout this information seeking time the evaluator may ascertain other important reason of doing an evaluation; e.g. – other information should be sought instead of just concerning the evaluation on whether the objectives were achieved

What are the informational uses of evaluation?

* At the outset of this text the authors defined evaluation as “enhancing our understanding of the value of whatever is evaluated” (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004, p. 176)
* Evaluation is also used for garnering information for purposes other than the one stated above; it can be used for: planning and needs assessments; monitoring or process study; outcomes study; and, cost-effectiveness/ cost-benefits

Are evaluations just meant to be for informational purposes?

* Belief that the inclusion of evaluations, in and of itself, makes a positive difference
* Stakeholders may see the system as being open to feedback where evaluation process exists
* Provides another means by which to make decisions
* Evaluations may also empower stakeholders by seeing that they have a voice in the process, and also educate them to develop new skills from the evaluation process
* According to Weiss (as cited in Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004), evaluation also has some negative uses:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Postponement – delay decision * Ducking responsibility | * Public relations – looking for a way to get the program noticed * Fulfillment of grant requirements |

What are the conditions in which conducting an evaluation is inappropriate?

* When the evaluation could harm the field of evaluation
* When it fails to support the social good
* When it produces trivial information
* When nothing will be done with the results
* When it does not yield useful, valid information
* When the type of evaluation is premature for the stage of the program
* When it is deemed that the results for undertaking the study are not honourable

What is *evaluability assessment?*

* A tool to determine support communication between stakeholders and evaluators to determine whether the program in question is “evaluable” and if so, a forum to begin to discuss the evaluations process itself
* First developed to be a precursor the summative evaluation
* Now also used to clarify purpose of formative study

What are advantages of hiring external evaluator?

1. Viewed as more impartial/objective – distanced from program, staff and stakeholders
2. Possibly viewed as more credible by outside audience (especially if controversial program
3. External evaluator (likely) possesses more expertise than internal evaluator
4. Bring with them outside perspective
5. May be greater chance informants will share sensitive information with ‘outsider’ (provided trust exists)
6. Better equipped to present unpopular information or advocate for change

What are advantages of using an internal evaluator?

1. More knowledge of program
2. More familiarity with the various stakeholders and their interests concerns.
3. Understand history (culture) of the organization, stakeholders, clients, etc.
4. After evaluation completed they remain with organization as advocate
5. Start up time far quicker as ‘evaluator’ already works for organization
6. You know what you’re getting

How does an evaluator identify intended audiences?

* Primary audience will be the client/sponsor
* List of questions have been developed by Lincoln and Guba to distinguish among audiences
* Meet with representatives from each group then determine through collaboration between client who should be included

What is the reason to set boundaries in determining what is to be evaluated?

* Need to set boundaries in order to determine what the evaluation is about
* “One can only evaluate adequately that which one can describe accurately” (p. 203)
* Need to have a detailed **program description** which is a description of the critical elements of a program. It may include:

|  |
| --- |
| * Goals and objectives * Critical components and activities * Description of target audience |

* It is imperative that the program description is detailed enough to inform the evaluator with an understanding of **why** the program is supposed to achieve the desired impact and serve as basis for identifying the questions to be asked in the evaluation.
* Evaluator also needs to determine what is not in the program being evaluated

What is program theory and how is it used to describe the program?

* *Program theory* is “a specification of what must be done to achieve the desired goals, what other important impacts may also be anticipated, and how these goals and impacts would be generated” (Chen as cited in Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004, p. 205).
* Used as a tool to 1) understand the program to be evaluated; and, 2) guide the evaluation
* It consists of 2 parts:
  + Normative theory - describes the program as it should be, its goals and outcomes, its interventions and the rationale for these – all from the perspectives of the stakeholders
  + Causation theory – use of existing literature and research to explain what the program outcomes should look like, while taking into account the characteristics of the clients and program actions
* Information garnered from this is used to develop a “program model”
* Basically then, program theory is a means by which to ascertain understanding the underlying assumptions of what the problem is and how the program will help solve the problem

Part 2

It appears that the inclusion of evaluation has several outcomes other than the sole and maybe somewhat idealistic one of determining the worth of the program or ‘thing’ being evaluated. As we have seen thus far in this course and have no doubt ascertained from our life experiences, worth and value are defined differently by different audiences. So even the author’s initial definition of evaluation as enhancing our understanding of the value of whatever is evaluated” (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004, p. 176) can be taken another way depending on who is defining what the particular ‘value’ in question is. Anyway, I digress. Coming back to the point that evaluation is a means to garner information for reasons other than value determination, I find of particular interest the notion of it being used in the process of planning and needs assessments. Indeed, it was in a earlier reflection where I was trying to explain to my colleagues that needs assessment is but one component of the overall picture of evaluation. But what does this means in terms of planning? Before I can contextual my thoughts regarding planning and evaluation, it is important to note that I am speaking of planning in terms of planning of programming; not the planning of evaluation.

In terms of the notion of evaluation and the program planning process, we learned at the outset of the course that it should be included as a tenant of the process. This makes good logical sense to me. However, it also begs the question, at least in my mind, at what point is evaluation the ‘chicken’ or the ‘egg?’ Indeed, if one of the roles of evaluation is to inform planning, does that mean that information garnered from past similar programs is used to guide the program being developed? Or on the other hand, does it mean that inherent in the evaluation process itself, is the ability to garner information that provides needed knowledge early enough in the process to guide developed of the current program. I am beginning to think that I am just talking myself in circle; and in reality, evaluation may do both.

In considering some of the value that I gained in reading chapters 10 and 11 was the fact that it gave me some real ‘meat’ to the evaluation process. Indeed, the use of a case study gave me the opportunity to view, ‘where the rubber hits the road’ so to speak. We can read about approaches, theories and the like until we are blue in the face, but until I can see some practical application I tend to be at a bit of a loss. I want to know how it works in the real world, and what tools I can use to make it work. So after reading these chapters I feel that I have a better understanding, and framework thanks to the checklists, by which to make determinations such as whether an evaluation is warranted (evaluability assessment), the identification of audiences, setting boundaries to determine what should be evaluate, and the importance of really getting to the ‘essence’ (my phenomenological bias shows through once again) of what the program should be, an what it actually is. This last point is to me very poignant in that there certainly may be a ‘conflict’ between what was supposed to be implemented and what actually was. So it becomes incumbent on the evaluator to ultimately describe to the stakeholders not what they think was evaluated, but what actually was..